

# The Living Light

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tance of "outcome" studies from a faith community's perspective, much could be learned from process-oriented research focusing on religious education from an educational perspective.

In this context, it is worth noting that of all the different fields of educational theory and research, one that could well offer useful help in the task of analyzing and clarifying religious education is the field of curriculum evaluation.<sup>11</sup> A rich literature in curriculum evaluation has developed within recent years.<sup>12</sup> Many of the implications for religious education have yet to be worked out.

1. The Education in Faith documents include the following well known publications: The Second Vatican Council's *Decree on Christian Education* (1965); *The Renewal of the Education of Faith* (Australia, 1970); *General Catechetical Directory* (Rome, 1971); Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975); *We Preach Jesus Christ As Lord* (Australia, 1976); *The Catholic School* (Rome, 1977); Pope John Paul II's *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979); *Sharing the Light of Faith* (U.S. National Conference of Bishops, 1979).

Books like M. Flynn's *Catholic Schools and the Communication of Faith* (1979) take up the theme "handing on the faith."

2. A comprehensive bibliography on research in religious education in Australia will appear in M.C. Mason (ed.), *A Bibliography of Research on Religion and Religious Organizations* to be published soon by the Australian Association for the Study of Religions.

A brief summary of research on religious education in Australia appears in the paper *Religious Education in Australian Schools* by G. M. Rossiter. This paper was prepared for the International Seminar on Religious Education and Values, New York, 1980.

3. R. F. Dearden, P. H. Hirst and R. S. Peters (eds.), *Education and the Development of Reason* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

4. M. Flynn, *Catholic Schools and the Communication of Faith* (Sydney: Society of St. Paul, 1979).

5. G. Rummery, "Catechesis and School" in *Word in Life* 26, 3 (1978), 90-93.

6. G. Rummery, *Catechesis and Religious Education in a Pluralist Society* (Sydney: Dwyer, 1975).

7. J. H. Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (Melbourne: Dove Communications, 1976).

With regard to the Catholic school system, the interest in religious education has long tended to come from the perspective of the faith community or from theological, historical, sociological or psychological points of view. A focus on religious education from an educational perspective could well complement these other approaches.<sup>13</sup> Such a focus would also profitably differentiate the specific concerns for religious education curriculum from those of a more general nature that relate to the environment of Catholic schooling.

8. G. Moran, "Where Now, What Next" in *Foundations of Religious Education*, P. O'Hare (ed.) (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), p. 106.

9. G. Moran, "Where Now, What Next," p. 105.

10. P. Fahy, "The Religious Effectiveness of Some Australian Catholic High Schools" in *Word in Life*, 28, 3 (1980), 87-98.

11. G. F. Madaus, "The Goals and Roles of Curriculum Evaluation in Religious Education," *The Irish Journal of Education* 7, 2 (1973), 117-128.

12. B. J. Fraser and K. Houghton, *An Overview of Some Curriculum Evaluation Literature*. Paper presented at the Teachers As Evaluators Conference, Sydney, 1979.

B. J. Fraser and K. Houghton, *Annotated Bibliography of Curriculum Evaluation Literature*. Draft version, Sydney: Macquarie University School of Education (1980).

13. One particular example of the potential value in studying religious education from an educational perspective is discussed in the book *Religious Education in Australian Schools* (ed. by G. M. Rossiter), to be published shortly. The new courses in religious education, developed, resourced and taught by state education departmental personnel, in some Australian states, cannot be concerned with handing on the faith tradition of a particular church. Consequently, these courses concentrate on an "educational" rather than a "faith-oriented" approach to religious education. Chapter 4 of the book suggests that the differentiation of educational from faith-oriented concerns in religious education may well have much significance and potential value for church schools involved with education in faith.

## Collapsing the Tensions

Kieran Scott

We live in language. It is our house of being. It establishes both the limits and horizons of our world. We create the words, but the words in turn shape our consciousness, maintaining or expanding the structures of our life-world.

What we name our work is very revealing of human interest. It calls our attention to some parts of human activity and turns away from others. Naming is a political act. It can be emancipatory or constraining. We can be certain it is never neutral.

The continuing search for terms adequate to the discussion of education and religion is a case in point. In another journal I recently reviewed the pros and cons of various terms,<sup>1</sup> but the debate continues. For the most part, at least in Roman Catholic circles, it focuses on the terms "religious education" and "catechesis."<sup>2</sup> In opting for the latter, the National Catechetical Directory did more than make a choice of words. It chose a theoretical framework which shaped the text throughout. Although the choice seems to have been dictated by practical considerations, it was in fact an endorsement of a particular point of view.

On the surface the position taken seems quite credible in the semantic world of the Church. It is what is

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assumed and unsaid, submerged and excluded which requires serious attention. The "official commentary" on the Directory notes the problem.<sup>3</sup> The reasons given for using catechesis might be persuasive for many, but others like myself remain unconvinced about the wisdom of the linguistic turn. The appeal for consistency in use of terms bring with it conceptual construction.

I center my reservations around three key items: profession, process and linguistic pattern. My thesis is that crucial distinctions need to be made within each of these categories and a creative dialectic held within them. The following discriminations are warranted. The first is between church ministry and religious education under profession; the second is between socialization and education under process; the third is between open and closed language systems under linguistic pattern. It is the blurring of these distinctions and the collapsing of the tensions that constitute the fundamental problem. I will take these three items in order.

### Profession

*Church Ministry and Religious Education*. There is a general tendency among proponents of catechetical language to substitute it for the language

of religious education, situating catechesis primarily in the context of pastoral ministry. *Sharing the Light of Faith* and other official documents point in the same direction. This tendency, however, that the terms represent fails to recognize two distinct enterprises and two professions that emerge from them. The temptation toward convergence covers over a critical difference, collapses the inherent tension and allows the co-option of religious education by catechetical ministry.

In a church context, catechesis and religious education are closely allied and overlap. However, the health and maturity of both require a distinctiveness and a dialectic. Both work under a different set of assumptions, pursue their own interests and questions, utilize alternative credentialed skills and judge their work on the basis of separate criteria. A person must be clear which field and profession he/she is entering.

Catechetical ministry takes as its frame of reference service in and on behalf of the Church. It is ecclesial activity directed by its ministers towards pastoral service, community building and religious evangelism. Its focus is on pastoral care, conservation of tradition and corporate works. Its concerns are an indigenous part of the Church's mission. (The Directory's recognition of this is both appropriate and accurate.)

Religious education, on the other hand, differs in scope, emphasis and intent. It needs to be understood in its own terms, studied in light of its own scholarship and traditions, and articulated in its own language form. Religious educators self-consciously work out of an educational, rather than a ministerial framework. They are responsible for structuring educa-

tive environments that make accessible our Christian heritage and the wisdom of other religious traditions. The religious educator works in the Church but with a critical distance. He/she brings the tools of educational critique to traditions and the institution that houses them. The focus is on inquiry, examination of presuppositions, reconstruction of institutional patterns and the reinterpretation of tradition for the enrichment of people's lives. The process is one of critical affirmation and, if trusted, can be an invaluable asset to the Church. However, retrenchment, conflict and burnout have sent many religious educators in recent years into ministerial services. I can well understand their frustration. But the pertinent question is: Can the Church afford to avoid and abandon the risk of religious education?

### Process

*Socialization and Education.* Paradoxically, the strength of catechesis is also its weakness. It is driven by an ardent search for a religious identity, a longing to express and press the distinctive qualities of a tradition on its people. The process is one of initiation, adaptation, transmission, translation, church-maintenance — in a word, religious socialization.

There is a religious and philosophical idealism at the root of this ideology. It fails to disclose or attend to the historical and social structures in which we dwell. The language masks the prevailing power relations, hides the domination of one group by another and unquestionably accepts the given and established ecclesial world.

Religious education, however, refuses to settle in as a mere agency of socialization. It insists on calling

into question the taken-for-granted. Its concern is for an education process that fosters creative tension. It raises the hard questions: What is the form and force of the socialization? Who controls what? Who decides? What traditions are made available? Whose interpretations are used? What are the sources of legitimation?

Education is our civil defense against barbarism (McLuhan). In the Church, it is our protective shield against traditionalism, authoritarianism, and fear of freedom. Its interest is emancipatory. It seeks to reclaim old wisdom for a new day and lead us out toward the reconstruction of our lives.

Catechesis ignores the educational connection. It has been the road not taken due to fear and a false identification with schooling. The pertinent question is: Can the Church support an educational process which emphasizes freedom and critical autonomy?

### Linguistic Patterns

*Open and Closed Language.* The heart of the discussion is more than a question of words. The selection of "catechesis" over "religious education" is a clear political choice. The quest is for a consistent pattern of conversation. What emerges is a stable but parochial language form that begs for self-critique.

Catechetical language prevents it from seeing what is in front of its eyes. It is a(n) (en)closed semantic

world centered on the ecclesial. Its linguistic pattern places barriers to communication with other religions and the non-religious.

Religious education, however, seeks to comprehend one's own religious tradition and to cross over in search of understanding of the religious ways of others. In this process there is an awareness that Catholic culture is no longer a self-contained island and that religious understandings must be worked out in a context of religious diversity. This calls for a more open and educational language form with communicative sensitivities. The urgent question has become: Can we create a language form that reduces the intolerance in our speech and opens avenues of discourse with our public world?

A concluding remark: The debate to now is a fair summary of where we have been. Where we need to go has been blurred by the lack of distinctions. We will live most creatively when we learn to dwell between the tensions—guarding and honoring the richest meaning of all the words.

1. See, "Communicative Competence and Religious Education," in *Lumen Vitae* 35 (1980) 76-96.
2. Among the most recent contributions to the search for "a foundational language" are essays by Michael Warren and Mary C. Boys in *Religious Education* 76 (March-April, 1981), pp. 115-127; and 128-141.
3. B.L. Marthaler, *Sharing the Light of Faith: An Official Commentary*. Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1981; pp. 15-16.